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Pathways to Power:
Women's Representation in the 2014 European Parliament Elections

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ABSTRACT

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections produced a record proportion of women MEPs overall (37 per cent). Yet, these results vary widely across countries and parties. This article aims to explain these variations, evaluating not only who the elected representatives of the 8th European Parliament are, but also how they got there. Are the paths to the EP the same for women and men? Are there gender differences in terms of MEPs' political experience? We utilise a unique data set listing more than 700 elected MEPs and their background, party and country characteristics to empirically examine who makes it to the EP and through which route. The results of the analysis suggest no significant gender differences in the pathways to the European Parliament. Yet, parties matter: more women were elected to the 8th EP from left-wing than from right-wing or 'new' parties, and both men and (especially) women representing right-wing parties tend to be politically more experienced than their fellow MEPs from other types of parties. Furthermore, we find that men are more likely than women to be promoted straight from party office to the European Parliament, suggesting that some pathways to the EP are less open to women than others.

INTRODUCTION

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were arguably the most important such elections to date. Debates over the role and scope of the EU were highly politically salient – including debates over the EU's handling of the Eurozone crisis and the merits of austerity measures, as well as plans for further political and economic integration. Also at stake, for the first time, was the election of the Commission President. The elections, as expected, resulted in gains for anti-European parties on the right and left in many countries, including the UK, France and Greece. Yet, the 2014 EP elections were also notable in that they produced a record proportion of women MEPs overall (37 per cent).

This electoral outcome provides further weight to the argument that the EP is more 'women-friendly' than most national parliaments, where the share of women MPs tends to be significantly lower. Yet, while there is a large body of research dedicated to the relationship between gender, candidate recruitment and women's representation at the national level (see for example Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006), decidedly less attention has been paid to the recruitment and representation of women in arguably less competitive 'second-order' elections, including elections to the EP. The research that does exist on women's representation in the EP, meanwhile, provides a more nuanced picture, highlighting cross-national as well as cross-party variations in EP election results (see for example Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014, 2015; Luhiste 2015). Indeed, in 2014 there were significant cross-national differences in the exact share of women elected to the EP, ranging from over 50 percent in Croatia, Ireland, and Finland to less than 20 percent in Hungary, Cyprus and Lithuania. These differences could be partly caused by the fact that most political parties do not have an unlimited supply of high quality, experienced candidates to occupy the positions they must fill at various levels of government (Pemstein et al 2015). The question, then, is how parties 'split' their supply of high quality candidates between different electoral levels and who, in the end, gets sent to the European Parliament. Uncovering and exploring these differences, therefore, requires a deeper exploration of the political pathways to the EP.

This article, therefore, seeks to investigate, at the individual level, who the elected representatives of the 8th European Parliament are and how they got there. Are the paths to the EP the same for women and men? Do different types of parties endorse similar candidates? Are there gender differences in terms of MEP's political experience? Individual decisions at the candidate level do not take place within a vacuum; they are shaped by the broader features of the party and political system (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997). As such, the central aim of this article is not only to examine potential differences in the background of male and female MEPs, but to investigate how varying party and country characteristics – such as party ideology, the adoption of candidate quotas, and the supply of female politicians at the national level– influence men's and women's political pathways to the EP. Utilising a unique data set listing more than 700 elected MEPs and their background, party and country characteristics, we examine *who* makes it to the 8th EP *through which route*. Importantly, we develop an MEP-based, rather than solely party- or country-based approach that allows us to simultaneously take into account MEP, party, and country level characteristics. The results of the analysis suggest no general gender differences in terms of MEPs prior experience. However, men, more often than women, enter the EP directly from party office, without holding a prior elected seat, while women are more likely to turn their incumbency into an elected seat in the 8th EP. Moreover, party characteristics matter: more women are elected to the 8th EP from left-wing than from right-wing parties, and women

representing right-wing political parties tend to be older than their fellow MEPs from other types of parties.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

It is commonly assumed that women's representation is higher at the EU level than the national level. Indeed, the evidence confirms that, in general, women have higher levels of descriptive (numerical) representation in the EP than in the lower legislative houses of the EU member states, a pattern which has been consistent across three decades of direct European elections (Vallance and Davies 1986; Norris 1997; Footitt 2002; Freedman 2002; Kantola 2010). In 2014, women were 37 per cent of the EP, compared to 27 per cent of MPs across the national parliaments of the 28 EU member states.

Kantola (2010) outlines four central explanations for why there are more women in the EP than in European national parliaments. First, institutional circumstances may differ because some countries have different electoral systems for the two parliaments. Since 1999, MEPs have been elected on the basis of proportional representation (PR), though member states are free to choose their own voting system within these common principles. It is well-established in the literature on women's representation that women candidates generally tend to do better in PR electoral systems with multi-member constituencies, than in plurality or majority systems with single-member districts, as are used in British and French national elections, for example (see for example Rule 1987; Paxton 1997; McAllister and Studlar 2002). Recent research in this area, however, offers mixed findings as to the impact of electoral rules on women's numerical representation in the EP. While Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2014) find that variations in electoral rules between EU member states do not have a systematic impact on the number of women among all candidates, studies focusing on viable candidacy suggest that the use of closed-list PR increases women's party-determined viability and chances of being elected to the EP (Luhiste 2015).

The second explanation for the higher proportion of women representatives in the EP centres around the argument that the style of politics is different in the EP compared to some national parliaments. Footitt (2002) shows that women MEPs consider the European Parliament more 'women-friendly' than other political bodies, primarily because the hours are more structured, committee work involves discussions rather than debates, and the politics in general is less confrontational than, for example, politics in the British parliament. A third, and related, explanation is the fact that the EP is a relatively new institution, with the first direct elections taking place in 1979, leaving less chance for the establishment of men's incumbency advantage and opening up more opportunities for women to be selected and elected.

The fourth set of explanations offered for the more gender equal composition of the EP is that the EP is considered less important and attractive when compared to national-level politics. EP elections are frequently classified by scholars as 'second-order' events, in that they resemble local or regional elections rather than 'first-order' presidential or parliamentary ones which lead to the formation of a government (Marsh 1998; Hix and Marsh 2011). The argument is that there is 'less at stake' in second-order elections (SOE) than in first-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2005), which may increase women's chances for more equal representation. Because SOEs are thought to be less important, the selection and election process is not as competitive as becoming a member of the national parliament, which may facilitate women's candidacies (Kantola 2010). Additionally, the fact that there is

‘less at stake’ may make SOEs less attractive for male candidates, opening up more opportunities for women candidates to stand than in first-order elections (Chiva 2014). Moreover, parties may see SOEs as an opportunity to ‘prove’ their gender equality credentials by fielding larger number of women candidates in less important elections (Kovář and Kovář 2012).

However, these kinds of explanations have become less convincing over time. The EU has changed dramatically in recent years, both in scale and in scope, while successive EU treaty amendments have increased the power of the European Parliament. There is, then, arguably much more at stake now in EP elections – both for voters and for political parties – which may make the process of becoming an MEP more competitive (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014; Whitaker 2014). Thus given that the proportion of women MEPs has increased at the same time that the EP has gained more authority, the argument that ‘where there is power, there are no women’ does not seem to hold in this case.

More importantly, while these standard explanations may offer some insights into why women’s representation is higher at the aggregate level in the EP, they do not explain cross-national and cross-party variations in women’s representation at EU-level (for recent exceptions see especially Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014, 2015; Luhiste 2015). As Figure 1 highlights, women’s representation is not higher in the EP for all EU member states, and there is considerable variation across countries and parties in terms of the proportion of female politicians that they send to the EP, casting doubt on the assumption that getting elected to the EP is necessarily easier for women than obtaining a seat in a national parliament.

(FIGURE 1 HERE)

THEORISING GENDERED PATHWAYS TO THE EP

In seeking to explain these variations, this article asks the question of which women are being elected to the EP, and how the attributes of these women compare with those of male MEPs. Were paths to the 8th European Parliament the same for women and men? Were there gender differences in terms of MEPs’ political experience in 2014? Were these differences moderated by party and/or country characteristics?

While there is an emerging body of literature on political pathways to and political careers in the EP, few studies address how these dynamics might affect men and women differently. The small body of work that does exist in this area focuses mainly on the question of whether politicians use the Parliament as a ‘retirement home’ or as a stepping-stone to a career in national-level politics (Westlake 1994; Scarrow 1997). More recent studies have asked whether a new pattern of European political career is in the making, pointing to the potential emergence of a supranational political elite (Verzichelli and Edinger 2005; Beauvallet and Michon 2010; Whitaker 2014). Yet, with few exceptions, this literature is almost entirely gender-blind. For example, Whitaker (2014) argues that the EP is becoming a more attractive option for a long-term political career, highlighting the evidence that the average length of service of MEPs has increased and that turnover on committees has fallen. Yet, this study makes no reference to women or gender, failing to ask, for example, whether career patterns and the ‘costs’ of becoming an MEP may differ between men and women. Meanwhile, those studies that do refer to gender tend to focus on the role of party- or country-level characteristics in shaping descriptive levels of female representation in the EP (see for

example Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014, 2015), but have not considered whether gender shapes the routes and pathways men and women take to the EP.

In light of the wider literature on men's and women's access to political office, we expect to find gender differences in terms of some aspects of MEPs' career pathways (see for example Murray 2010; Schwindt-Bayer 2011; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; Allen et al 2014). First, we expect to find gender differences in some aspects of legislator backgrounds, reflected in the type of past political experience held by female and male MEPs. We anticipate that for both men and women, the predominant career pathway will be upwards from other 'second order' elective experience, including the local or regional level. We argue that this may especially be the case for women MEPs, as politics 'closer to home' (that is, at the regional or local level) is often argued to encourage women's political participation (see for example Ortals et al 2012). In contrast, we envisage less movement downwards from the 'first-order' national level. Recent research on MEPs' careers suggests that fewer MEPs are viewing the EP as a 'retirement home', instead viewing it as either an attractive career option in itself, or as a stepping stone to a national political career (Whitaker 2014). The evidence suggests, then, that the goal for European politicians is generally either to move up the career ladder to national office, or to stay put. However, while we hypothesise that politicians are unlikely to move from national level office to the EP, we expect to see more women MEPs and more experienced women MEPs from countries in which women enjoy higher levels of descriptive representation at the national level. The expectation here is that in order to have higher shares of women in 'first-level' elected office, these countries must have a larger pool of eligible female candidates, increasing the likelihood of having higher numbers of women MPs at other political levels, including the EP. With regards to incumbency, as above, the wider literature on gender and political recruitment suggests that men are more likely to be incumbent MEPs than women (see for example Murray 2008).

As already highlighted, analysing gender differences in political pathways to the EP also requires paying attention to the wider political and institutional landscape (cf. Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014). Research on women and politics overwhelmingly finds that left parties are more likely to support women's candidacies because they espouse egalitarian ideologies that are centred on promoting equality of outcome (Caul 1999; Kenny and Verge 2013). They are also usually more strongly linked with women's movement actors. Parties of the right, on the other hand, promote an 'equality of opportunity' approach that centres on a gender-neutral understanding of access to political power, or that emphasises a more traditional view of women's roles (Rule 1987; Chiva 2014). Leftist parties are also typically the first to introduce gender quotas for women's political representation, which may set in motion a process of 'contagion' across parties, whereby rival parties will follow suit in order to compete (Matland and Studlar 1996; Kenny and Verge 2013; Kenny and Mackay 2014). We would therefore expect more women MEPs in the 2014 EP to come from parties of the left, rather than parties of the right.

Other scholars suggest that the left-right dimension is too simple to capture how ideology affects women's representation, arguing instead that researchers should distinguish between 'Old Politics' cleavages of class conflict and 'New Politics' issues and cleavages (Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006). Research suggests that new parties may be more receptive to the entrance of women and other marginalised groups than traditional parties (Matland and Studlar 1996; Norris 1996). New parties, irrespective of ideology, may also be more open to newcomers as they have fewer entrenched power-holders and incumbents. At the same time, however, we recognize that not all new parties are the same – for example, parties of the New Left (such as

Green parties) might be much more likely to promote women's representation than parties of the radical right. We thus nuance our classification of 'new parties' by considering parties' positions on European integration (unification), thereby taking into account one of the distinctive features of EP elections in comparison with national parliamentary contests (cf. Chiva 2014). Given the EU's key role from its inception as a gender equality actor (Kantola 2010), political parties with a positive stance towards further EU unification might be more likely to take gender equality concerns into consideration when selecting their candidates. Conversely, Eurosceptic parties might be more likely to resist the 'diffusion of gender equality norms' from the European to the national level (Chiva 2014: 461). We therefore expect more women to come from pro-EU parties than Eurosceptic parties.

In EU member states, parties' menu of choices in terms of candidate selection for EP elections is also conditioned by whether the party or state has adopted candidate gender quotas (Luhiste 2015). Legal quotas, which are enacted through reforms to electoral laws or sometimes constitutions, require that all parties in a particular country nominate a certain percentage of female candidates. Voluntary or party quotas, on the other hand, are usually outlined in party rules and statutes and entail commitments by individual political parties to include a specific proportion of women among their nominated candidates. We anticipate therefore, that in EU countries with either legal or party quotas (or both), the percentage of women MEPs will be higher than in those member states that do not use these measures.

Lastly, we expect to find gender differences between male and female MEPs in terms of basic demographic features. We anticipate that as a result of prevailing gender norms that value women's roles as caretakers, female MEPs will enter politics when least affected by family responsibilities and motherhood (cf. Franceschet and Piscopo 2014). For women with caring responsibilities in particular, there are costs to being an MEP, including travel back and forth between member states and Strasbourg and Brussels (Norris 1997). Thus, we would likely see less women MEPs than male MEPs in their 30s and 40s, as women in these age ranges are more likely to have child-caring responsibilities that constrain their political careers. Instead, we would hypothesise that women MEPs would be largely concentrated on either end of the age spectrum. On the one hand, we might expect more women MEPs from the ages of 50 and above – comparative evidence suggests that women may delay their entry into public office, in part to take time off to raise families (Schwindt-Bayer 2011; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014). Overall, however, we would anticipate women MEPs to be younger as a group than their male counterparts. Younger women may be more likely to run because some of them do not yet have family responsibilities. In addition, men, who tend to have longer political careers and are the majority of incumbents, are likely to be more heavily represented amongst the older age groups within the European Parliament (cf. Murray 2010), while women might be more likely to be new or recent MEPs. We expect this to particularly be the case in the 2014 EP elections, where (as above) many of the smaller and 'new' parties put a significant emphasis on bringing in 'new blood' - including younger candidates (both male and female) with little political experience¹. Given the above highlighted 'costs' of being an MEP, we also control for the distance to Brussels.

DATA AND METHODS

¹ Data on marital status and number of children was not available for most MEPs, so we did not include these variables in our analysis, although we acknowledge that additional research in this area would be very useful.

To empirically examine *who* makes it to the EP *through which route*, we utilise a purpose-built unique data set listing all 751 elected MEPs to the 8th EP. To compile the data set, we downloaded the full list of MEPs, elected in 2014, from the European Parliament website. From the same source, we gathered information on each MEP's sex, age, and national and European party (group) affiliation. As the aim of this article is to uncover the routes MEPs have taken to the 8th EP, we then systematically searched and examined MEPs' personal and party websites to collect information on their past political background. In addition, we utilised existing data sources, such as the 2014 European Election Study (EES) Voter Survey, FEMM Committee (2014) report, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union's database, to gather data on each MEPs party and country characteristics. All this information was then added to our data set, resulting in the first comprehensive new data source on the individual MEPs elected in 2014.

Our central variable of interest is MEPs' prior career position, held immediately before being elected to the European Parliament². We use two different measures of prior career position in our analysis. First, we distinguish between five categories of prior career position: (1) incumbent MEP, (2) national level political office (both legislative and government), (3) regional or local level political office (both legislative and government), (4) central, regional, local, or EP level party office, and (5) no political office. Secondly, we utilise a dummy variable of whether an MEP held an elected office, at any level, immediately before being elected to the 8th European Parliament or not, with not holding an elected office being the reference category. MEPs who were incumbents, members of national, regional, or local legislatures, or members of national, regional, or local governments immediately before being elected to the EP in May 2014 are classified as holding an elected office. All other MEPs are considered as not holding a prior elected office immediately before the May 2014 EP elections, independent of whether they had held any elected office further in the past³.

We have linked this individual level data to information on various party and country level indicators. We rely on the FEMM Committee (2014) report for information on legislative candidate gender quotas and voluntary party quotas. In the 2014 EP elections, seven member states (Belgium, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain) applied legislative candidate gender quotas and in total 26 national parties across all EU member states had adopted voluntary candidate gender quotas. We thus use two dichotomous variables – voluntary party quotas and legislative quotas – in our models, with no quotas being the reference category.

In terms of party ideology, we distinguish between both left-wing and right-wing parties, and between pro-EU unification and anti-EU unification parties. Respondents of the 2014 EES

² In some cases, an MEP may have held a political office in the past but was not an elected member of any representative body while the 2014 EP elections took place. Such MEPs are considered not to have held a prior elected office because they were not holding it immediately before being elected to the 8th EP.

³ We acknowledge that MEPs with experience in elected office further in the past may differ from those with no elected office experience. However, any data on all MEPs' historical political experience is bound to be limited by potential measurement errors, as the information publicly available on the current MEPs early political careers is inconsistent and irregular.

Voter Survey⁴ were asked to place parties on a 11-point scale with regards to their left-right ideology⁵ as well as on their position on European unification⁶. We utilise the mean values the parties received as a proxy of party ideology, with lower values indicating a more left-wing placement on the left-right dimension and a more Eurosceptic position on the European unification dimension⁷.

In addition, we relied on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's database for information on women's political representation at the national level in each of the 28 member states. While all EU countries are required to utilise a proportional electoral system to elect their MEPs, individual member states are free to vary the openness of ballot structure. As past research indicates that the openness of ballot structure is likely to influence women's electoral chances (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014; Luhiste 2015), we control for the presence or absence of preference vote option, with the latter being the baseline category.

As the dependent variables of interest are categorical (female/male; prior elected office experience/no experience) and the data are clustered by party and country, we employ robust standard errors and estimate both logistic regression models without country-fixed effects and conditional logistic regression models with country-fixed effects.

RESULTS

In order to explain gendered pathways to the 8th European Parliament, we first explore the conditions under which women have higher chances of being elected as MEPs. To examine this, we estimate a logistic regression model that includes individual, party, and country level characteristics that are known to explain women's representation. As Table 1 reveals, party ideology, the share of women in national legislature, and MEPs' age account for most of the gender variance, while quota rules show little statistically significant impact. Therefore, while

⁴ As the data on parties' ideological positions, measured by the Comparative Party Manifesto (CMP) project, were not available while writing the manuscript, we have had to rely on alternative sources.

⁵ Respondents of the EES 2014 Voter Survey were asked the following question concerning up to 8 national political parties: 'And about where would you place the following political parties on this scale? How about the...? Which number from 0 to 10, where '0' means "left" and '10' means "right" best describes this party?'

⁶ Respondents of the EES 2014 post-election Voter Survey were asked the following question concerning up to 8 national political parties: 'And about where would you place the following parties on this scale? How about the (Party X)? Which number from 0 to 10, where 0 means "[European unification] already gone too far" and 10 means "[European unification] should be pushed further" best describes [Party X]?'

⁷ Respondents of the 2014 EES Voter Survey were not asked to position independent candidates or all of the parties that gained representation in the 8th European Parliament on the left-right and EU unification scale. This means that some elected MEPs resulted with missing values, reducing the final sample size to 707 MEPs. As a result, MEPs with no national party affiliation (independents) and MEPs representing very small parties (usually the only MEPs from the given party) are missing from the sample. However, there are no statistically significant gender differences across the MEPs' prior elected office backgrounds dependent on whether they are included in the analysis or not. Also, analysis including all 751 MEPs (but including a simplified categorical variable for measuring party ideology) yields to similar results with regards to other co-variates of interest.

quota rules are designed to increase the number of women among candidates, their effectiveness in increasing the probability of electoral success for women remains limited.

Overall, left-wing parties are significantly more likely to have a female representative to Brussels than right-wing parties. The magnitude of the effect is quite large, with an MEP being a woman being 18 percentage points higher for the most left-wing party compared to the most right-wing party. Hence, our data confirms the theoretical expectations of left-wing parties embracing more egalitarian ideologies and thus promoting more gender equal representation than other types of parties. While parties which are more Eurosceptic tend to be less likely to have women MEPs than more Europhile parties, these results fail to reach traditional levels of statistical significance (Table 1).

Table 1 also shows that country level characteristics matter. The higher the proportion of women parliamentarians at the national level, the more likely member states are to elect more women to the EP. For example, if women constitute 20 percent of elected representatives in the national legislature, the probability of a woman representing this country in the EP is .34 compared to .42 for a country in which the share of women among MPs is 40 percent (Table 1). These results suggest that countries with higher levels of descriptive representation may be better able to ‘afford’ to send more women to Brussels as they are more likely to have a larger supply of high quality, experienced women candidates.

(TABLE 1 HERE)

MEPs’ age also explains gender variance in the EP. As we expected, women MEPs tend to be younger than male MEPs. The estimated probabilities suggest that the likelihood of the youngest MEP being a woman is more than 25 percentage points higher than the likelihood of the oldest MEP being female. These results point to a generational change: the gradual replacement of older MEPs is likely to lead to higher levels of women’s representation in the EP. However, when examining the relationship between age and party ideology in the EP, this assumption no longer fully holds. The estimates illustrated in Figure 2 show that age decreases the likelihood of the MEP being a woman for left-wing parties but not for right-wing parties⁸. While the probability of sending an older woman of more than 60-years of age to Brussels is very low for all types of parties (and does not vary in a statistically significant way across party ideologies), left-right ideology is an important determinant of MEP’s gender in the younger and middle-aged cohort. The age differences amongst female MEPs are smaller when it comes to the EU-unification dimension. Yet, more Europhile parties have a statistically significantly higher likelihood of having middle-aged female representatives in the 8th EP than more Eurosceptic parties⁹. Due to significant differences in the probabilities of having younger and middle-aged female representative across party ideologies, generational change will likely be constrained by which types of parties are electorally stronger.

⁸ Parties that received from the EES 2014 Voter Survey respondents a mean value smaller or equal to 6.66 (median value for all the parties) on the left-right scale, are classified as left-wing parties. Parties that received a higher value than that, are classified as right-wing parties.

⁹ Parties that received from the EES 2014 Voter Survey respondents a mean value smaller or equal to 5.83 (median value for all the parties) on the EU unification scale, are classified as Eurosceptic parties. Parties that received a higher value than that, are classified as Europhile parties.

(FIGURE 2 HERE)

As an initial investigation of the relationship between gender and political experience, we estimated a logistic regression model with and without country fixed effects explaining individual MEPs' likelihood of either having or not having prior elected office before entering the EP. As Table 2 reveals, women, in general, are just as likely as men to hold a previous elected political office (either at the EP, national, or local level). Moreover, the finding that parties do not send inexperienced women (or men) to the EP may again indicate that the EP is not considered as 'second-order' by party gatekeepers as some media commentators and researchers often assume. It is also noteworthy that the findings presented do not vary substantially across countries. In the majority of countries, the percentage of women with prior elected office experience is similar to the share of men holding an elected seat prior to being voted into the 8th EP. However, in Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia women are considerably more likely than men to have held a prior elected office, while the opposite applies for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, and Malta. All of the outliers represent countries with very small EP delegations, meaning that the noted gender differences within these member states can often be the result of only one male or female MEP not having held a prior elected office.

Table 2 also shows that MEPs representing Eurosceptic or left-wing parties are less likely to have held an elected office before entering the 8th EP compared to the MEPs from more Europhile or right-wing parties, respectively. This is likely to be the case due to the fact that many of the Eurosceptic parties competed for the first time in the 2014 European Parliament elections and/or lacked political representation at the national level. Moreover, many parties put a deliberate emphasis on selecting candidates with no (or limited) political experience to distinguish themselves from mainstream parties – in the Italian 5 Stars Movement, for example, there was some controversy over the candidacy of now-MEP Giulia Moi, who was accused of hiding previous political experience.

The results in Table 2 also point to a weak candidate quota effect. The model without country fixed effects but with additional country level control variables indicates that MEPs representing parties that apply voluntary candidate quotas are more likely to have held an elected office before being voted into the 8th European Parliament (see Model 1 in Table 2). This effect, however, loses traditional levels of significance in a model including country-fixed effects.

To further examine the impact party characteristics have on MEPs' pathways to the European Parliament, Models 2 and 4 in Table 2 include interaction effects of MEP gender and party characteristics. In addition, our data indicate that women from parties that use candidate gender quotas are just as likely to have held an elected political office before entering the 8th EP in 2014 as women from parties without such rules. Furthermore, women MEPs from countries with legal candidate quotas are more likely than women from countries with no such rules to have prior elected office experience. This means that the potential 'quota women' are no less politically experienced than women from parties and countries without quota rules (in fact, they may be more so). Also, given that the MEPs elected from parties that employed candidate quotas are somewhat more likely to have held a prior elected office but this effect does not vary by gender, this further indicates that the quota measures tend to increase the overall level of experience of elected MEPs and not that of only women or men. While the negative interaction effect of gender and left-right party ideology suggests that women MEPs representing right-wing parties are somewhat more likely to have held prior

elected office than women from left-wing parties, these results do not yield to traditional levels of statistical significance.

(TABLE 2 HERE)

While the initial analysis show no significant gender differences with regards to MEPs' prior experience in elected office, we still need to investigate whether women and men enter the EP from a similar type of elected (or non-elected) office. In order to test this, we estimated a multinomial logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of the MEP being an incumbent, having held a national or a regional level political office, coming from a party office, or having no prior political experience. As Figure 3 reveals, there is the highest probability of an MEP being an incumbent compared to other prior career position options. Moreover, women MEPs have a slightly higher probability (.49) of being incumbents than men (.48 probability), though the difference is not statistically significant. The analysis thus indicates that once women manage to get elected to the EP, they are at least as likely as men to hold on to their elected seat.

In contrast, while the probability of an MEP being a political outsider does not vary considerably by gender (.12 for women, .11 for men), the likelihood of a male MEP coming from a party office is statistically significantly higher than the probability of a woman entering the EP directly from a party office (.10 for women compared to .15 for men). Hence, in a situation where a politician does not hold an elected seat before the EP elections, parties may be more likely to facilitate an upward career move for men working in the party office compared to women. Alternatively, it is also possible that the supply of men in party office is greater than that of women, explaining the subsequent effects.

As can be seen from Figure 3, in most cases, women and men MEPs do not differ substantially from each other in terms of prior career position. The probability of being a political outsider or coming from either national or regional/local level political office is the same for both men and women MEPs. Interestingly, the probability of entering the EP from national elected office (.16 for women and .18 for men) is much higher than that of coming from regional/local level politics (.12 for women, .10 for men). Thus the analysis suggests that political careers are more likely to move downward (from national level to the European level) than upward (from regional/local level to the European level) for both female and male MEPs. These results may be explained by the increasing salience of European issues in national politics as well as by the increasing importance of the European Parliament in EU level politics, thus making the EP less of a second order office than traditionally perceived.

(FIGURE 3 HERE)

CONCLUSION

The 2014 European Parliament Elections confirm, on aggregate, that women are better represented in the EP than in most national parliaments, while also highlighting cross-national and cross-party variations in the numbers of women elected at European level. In seeking to explain these variations, this article has explored the MEP, party and country level characteristics that shape men's and women's pathways to the EP, offering new insights into who the members of the 8th European Parliament are and how they got there.

Our investigation of the gendered pathways to the EP yields some surprising findings in light of previous work in this area. Existing research on women's descriptive representation at the national level suggests that the best predictors of women's legislative representation are institutional factors, including the type of electoral system in use and the implementation of gender quotas. Our study confirms that the wider context does matter for female politicians in European elections, showing, as we expected, that more women MEPs are elected from countries with higher levels of women's representation at the national level. However, we find that other institutional factors – including gender quotas and electoral ballot structure – are not statistically significant in explaining the gender variation among MEPs. The question, of course, is not just whether quotas are 'on the books', but whether they are actually followed, pointing to the need for further research into the implementation of these measures at EP level.

What matters most in explaining levels of women's representation in the European Parliament is parties – our findings suggest that gains in women's representation at EP level continue to be constrained by party ideology. Research on women and politics has increasingly challenged the received wisdom in the field with regards to party ideology and leftist dominance on women's representation, pointing, for example, to the increasing number of women selected and elected by conservative parties around the world (see for example Celis and Childs 2014). Yet, in contrast to these findings, our study highlights the continuing importance of the traditional left-right cleavage for women's representation in the EP, with more women elected from left-wing parties than from right-wing parties. Moreover, we find that MEPs' pathways to the European Parliament vary by party ideology, with parties on the right of the political spectrum and/or holding more pro-European unification attitudes sending more experienced politicians to the EP than left-wing parties and/or more Eurosceptic parties. We assume that the reason why women MEPs from right-wing parties are more experienced than their colleagues from left-wing parties is partly due to the fact that women representing left-wing parties tend to be younger, while the likelihood of a female MEP from a right-wing party does not vary much by age. This suggests that right-wing parties keep promoting the candidature of young men over young women, thereby reducing the chances that generational replacement alone will solve the issues of women's political underrepresentation.

Overall, however, we find that women's and men's paths to the European Parliament are more similar than different – women and male MEPs have comparable levels of prior political experience in elected office and, in fact, women MEPs have a slightly higher probability of being incumbents than men, indicating that once women make it to the EP, they have a good chance of being re-elected. Moreover, women from parties that use candidate gender quotas have similar levels of political experience as women from parties without quota rules, findings which correspond more broadly to research on the effect of quotas on the types of women elected to legislatures at the national level (see for example Murray 2010; Schwindt-Bayer 2011; Franceschet and Piscopo 2014; Allen et al 2014). In fact, women MEPs from countries with legal quotas are more experienced than women from countries without such rules. On the one hand, these findings may bolster the efforts of campaigners seeking to promote women's representation, confirming that while women MEPs may be numerically under-represented, they are just as 'qualified' as their male counterparts. Yet, on the other hand, these findings may suggest that women are simply replicating traditional gendered pathways to political office, rather than bringing different experiences and backgrounds to the European Parliament, raising wider questions as to the

potential impact on the substantive representation of women's policy concerns (cf. Allen et al 2014).

The most common prior career position of the MEPs of the 8th EP is an elected seat in the previous assembly of the European Parliament, while the second most likely pathway is through national level political office. Men, however, are more likely than women to be promoted straight from party office to the European Parliament, suggesting that women may still be excluded from some elite political networks. These findings indicate that the EP may serve, on the one hand, as an individual career path to which politicians aspire. Once candidates have managed to secure a seat, they tend to hold on to it, confirming findings from other studies that point to the rise of 'European careerists' and the emergence of a supra-national political elite (see for example Whitaker 2014). On the other hand, the fact that the second most likely pathway to the European Parliament, for both men and women, is through national level elected office may suggest that the EP is becoming less of a second order office than traditionally perceived, raising questions as to whether progress on women's representation at European level will continue as the EP becomes a more desirable option for a political career.

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Figure 1: Percentage of Women MEPs and MPs by country, 2014

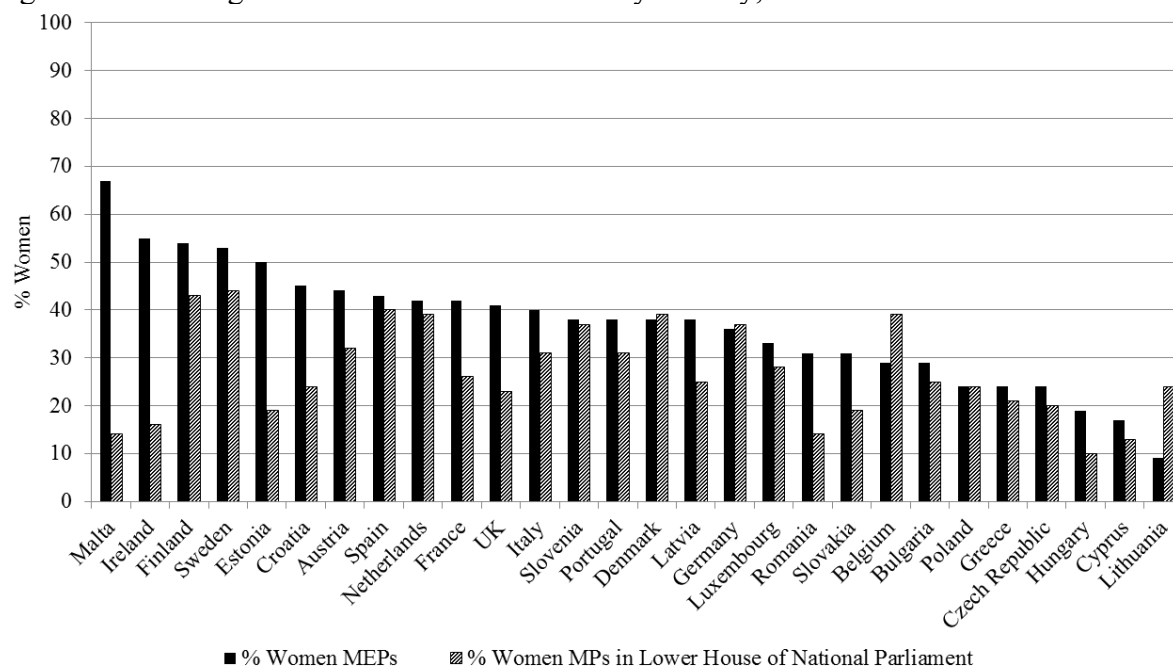


Table 1: Explaining gender variation among elected MEPs (Logistic regression coefficients)

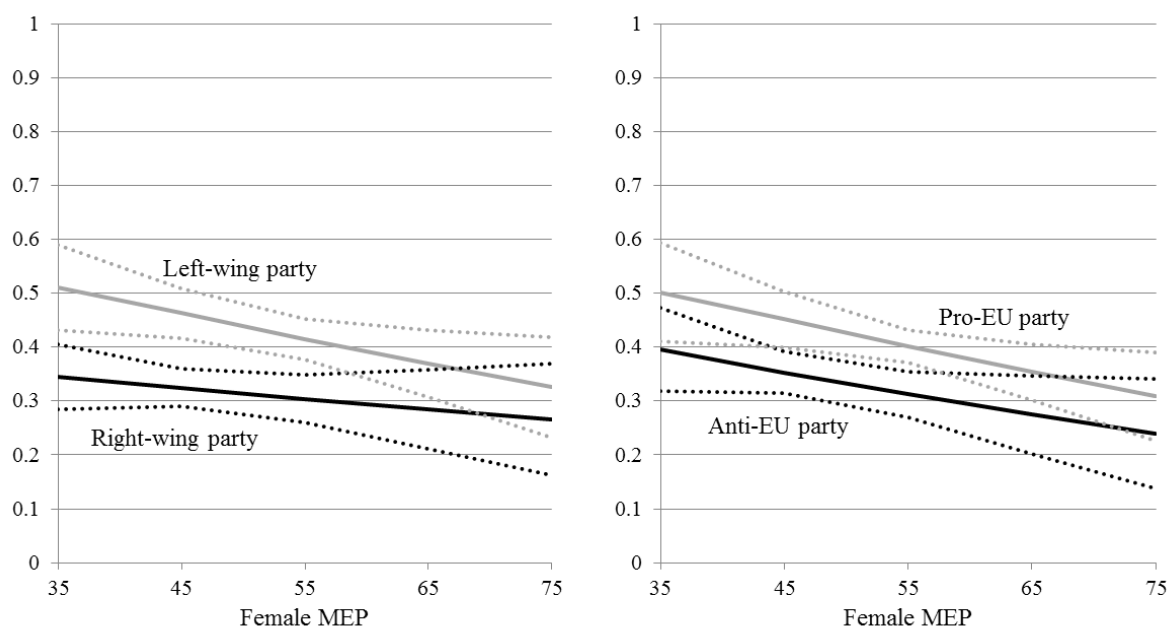
	Coef. (S.E.)		Change
Age (in years)	-0.02 (0.01)	**	-0.26
Party ideology: Left-Right (std.)	-0.19 (0.09)	*	-0.18
Party ideology: EU unification (std.)	0.11 (0.08)		0.15
Voluntary party quota	-0.01 (0.01)		-0.08
Legislative quota	-0.03 (0.19)		-0.01
Preference voting	-0.21 (0.17)		-0.05
Distance to Brussels	-0.05 (0.06)		-0.03
% women MPs	0.02 (0.01)	+	0.14
Constant	0.13 (0.37)		
<hr/>			
N (level 1)	707		
N (level 2)	28		
Wald chi2	120.01		
Prob > chi2	0.00		
Pseudo-R 2	0.22		

**p<0.01; *p<0.05; +p<0.10

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Change represents the maximum change in probability of the independent variable holding all other variables constant and their means and modes.

Figure 2: Estimated probabilities of electing a female or a male MEP by age and party ideology



Note: Estimates represent the probability of the elected MEP being a woman. Estimates are derived from the logistic regression model (Table 1) with robust standard errors; broken line represents 95% confidence intervals.

Table 2: Explaining the likelihood of holding prior political office (Logistic regression coefficients)

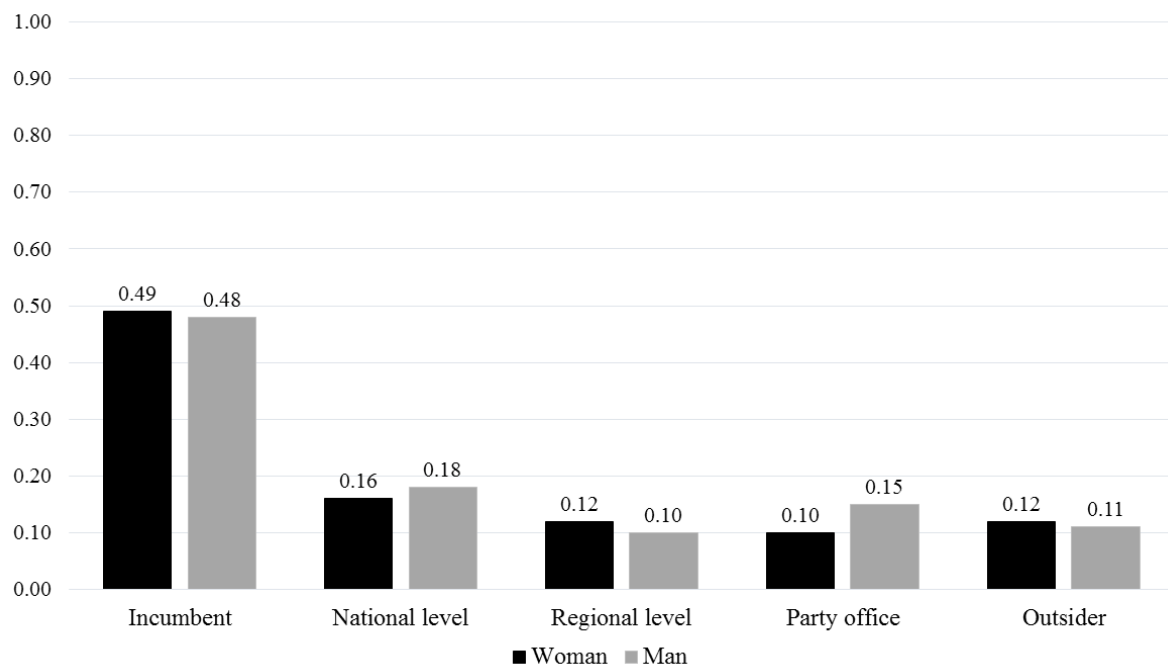
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coef. (S.E.)		Change	Coef. (S.E.)			Coef. (S.E.)			Coef. (S.E.)		
Woman	0.09 (0.25)		0.02	-0.27 (0.27)			0.06 (0.21)			0.20 (0.26)		
Age (in years)	0.05 (0.01)	**	0.46	0.06 (0.01)	**		0.05 (0.01)	**		0.05 (0.01)	**	
Party ideology: Left-Right (std.)	0.33 (0.10)	**	0.24	0.42 (0.13)	**		0.23 (0.10)	*		0.15 (0.06)	*	
Party ideology: EU unification (std.)	0.31 (0.17)	+	0.32	0.34 (0.17)	*		0.40 (0.11)	**		0.33 (0.13)	*	
Voluntary party quota	0.04 (0.01)	**	0.13	0.02 (0.01)			-0.02 (0.04)			-0.04 (0.04)		
Legislative quota	-0.11 (0.37)		-0.02	-0.46 (0.34)								
Preference voting	0.01 (0.29)		0.00	0.09 (0.28)								
% women MPs	0.02 (0.02)		0.11	0.02 (0.02)								
Woman * Left-Right				-0.24 (0.18)						-0.22 (0.22)		
Woman * EU unification				-0.11 (0.20)						0.02 (0.22)		
Woman * Party quota				-0.23 (0.67)						-0.79 (0.56)		
Woman * Legislative quota				1.17 (0.42)	**							
Constant	-1.99 (0.62)	**		-1.96 (0.66)	**							
Country-fixed effects	No			No			Yes			Yes		
N (level 1)	707			707			694			694		
N (level 2)	28			28			26			26		
LR chi2 / Wald chi2	61.33			185.13			52.33			57.74		
Prob > chi2	0.00			0.00			0.00			0.00		
AIC	714.94			711.35			578.54			583.13		

**p<0.01; *p<0.05; +p<0.10

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Change represents the maximum change in probability of the independent variable holding all other variables constant and their means and modes.

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of prior career positions for women and men MEPs



Note: Predicted probabilities are obtained from a multinomial logistic regression model (with robust standard errors), controlling for MEPs age, party ideology, candidate quotas, openness of ballot structure, and proportion of women in national parliament. All other variables are held constant at their means and modes.